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uninhabited hill country. Communications by pack horse road are slow and rough, and as the transport of goods by this means becomes expensive for any considerable distance, each valley lives as far as possible off its own produce. In sharp contrast to this economic "autarky" the whole country is politically unified, being a province of the Chinese Republic and entirely subject to the authority of the provincial government in Yunnanfu (K'un Ming). The province is sub-divided into *hsien*, or Districts, somewhat smaller than an English county, and the area occupied by the Min Chia can be defined politically as the eight Districts of Ta Li, Feng Yi (Chao chou), Teng Ch'uan, Erh Yuan, Chien Ch'uan, Ho Ch'ing, Lan P'ing and Yun Lung. The area east of the lake falls partly within the jurisdiction of Pin Ch'uan, which is not mainly a Min Chia district, and similarly the districts of Lan P'ing and Yun Lung to the west contain areas not inhabited by Min Chia. The political boundaries do not follow racial limits, being based on geographical features.

It is more than six centuries since the conquest of the kingdom of Nan Chao by Kubla Khan, Emperor of the Yuan or Mongol dynasty, brought western Yunnan into the Chinese Empire, where it has since remained in spite of the changes of dynasty which followed. To what extent the kingdom of Nan Chao, which had its capital at Ta Li, can be described as a Min Chia kingdom will be discussed in a later chapter; here all that need be said is that it is certain that the inhabitants of the Ta Li plain, the Min Chia, were not barbarians at the time of the Chinese conquest, and this fact differentiates them from most of the other tribes of Yunnan. The Min Chia are rice farmers, occupying for choice the best rice lands available, only rarely dwelling on the mountains, and unskilled in the types of husbandry appropriate for mountaineers. Almost all the other non-

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Chinese tribes on the high plateau of Yunnan are found in the hills, while the valleys and plateaux are in the hands of Chinese settlers or absorbed peoples now Chinese in language and custom.[1] It is safe to assume that when the Mongol emperors and their successors, the Chinese Mings, conquered Nan Chao they found the rice lands of the Ta Li plain already fully exploited by an industrious and skilled race of farmers, whom it was more profitable to tax than to expropriate.

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They therefore called them the "Min Chia", the "plebeians", the "common people", a term less of contempt than to distinguish the indigenous population with its strange language from the Chinese officials, soldiers and merchants who settled in Ta Li city, and before long intermarried with the people of the soil. The name Min Chia is thus Chinese, and not that used by the people themselves when speaking their own language. They call themselves, according to district, by several names generically related. Those of the Ta Li plain use mostly the term "Shua Bër Ni" meaning "speakers of the white (language)",[2] elsewhere Bër Dser, "White People", or in the western district of

[1] The exceptions to this rule are the Na Khi or Mo So of the Li Chiang district, and the Shans of the Burma border region. In the first case, the Li Chiang area on the northern border of Yunnan is the most remote of the lake plateaux from Chinese influence. It was also the seat of a powerful local kingdom, and it seems probable therefore that Chinese rule there was not strong enough to oust a people of fairly high culture. The Shans occupy the low plateaux west of the Salween, a country which the Chinese find very unhealthy and in which they are unwilling to settle. It is noteworthy that where the plateaux are higher, as at Teng Yueh, once a Shan state, the Chinese have taken possession.

[2] In Min Chia "white" *Ber*, does not have the meaning "plain" "intelligible" that the Chinese *Pai* carries. Therefore *Shua Ber Ni* does not mean "plain speakers" as opposed to unintelligible speech, as the Chinese *Pai Hua*, literally "white language", does mean.

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CHAPTER 4

THE PEOPLE OF THE WHITE PRINCE

IN A.D. 1252 Mongol troops under the command of the prince who later reigned as the Emperor Yuan Shih Tsu—better known in Europe as Kublai Khan—captured Ta Li from the last ruler of the Kingdom of Nan Chao. From that time to the present day the Min Chia who inhabit that district have been subjects of the dynasties which successively ruled China. Some remnant of local authority was left to the descendants of the Tuan dynasty of Nan Chao during the Mongol (Yuan) period, but when the Chinese Ming dynasty drove out the Mongols and conquered Yunnan in 1383, even this shadow autonomy disappeared. Under the Ming Emperors and their Manchu successors Ta Li was reduced to the position of a prefecture of Yunnan province, politically on the same footing as any other city of the same rank in the Empire. The Republic abolished the distinction between prefectures, sub-prefectures and district cities (*Fu*, *Chou* and *Hsien*) renaming all as *Hsien* so that the old designation "Ta Li Fu," still found on many European maps, became obsolete, and the name used to-day is simply Ta Li.

The Mongol conquest does not seem to have been followed by any great immigration of Chinese settlers, although it is in this period that the Moslem community, originally mercenary soldiers of the conquerors, became established in the western part of Yunnan. The Ming conquest 130 years later was followed by a great immigration of Chinese, also originally soldiers, who settled in the uninhabited parts of Yunnan and probably in many places displaced unsophisticated tribesmen from the better lands. In the Min Chia country this process was restricted to the settlement of

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several Chinese families in the city itself, for there was no eviction of the Min Chia peasantry on the plain. As Ta Li had been the capital of Nan Chao it is probable that the neighbourhood was then populated by a peasantry who had already cultivated all the good land, and it was found more profitable to tax the existing population than to replace them with Chinese settlers.

Several tombs of Chinese families bearing dates from the early Ming period, the fifteenth century of the Christian Era, still stand on the slopes above Ta Li, attesting the fact of immigration and settlement by Chinese from the provinces of the lower Yang Tze valley, in which region the first Ming capital, Nanking, was established. Some of these families still remain in Ta Li to-day, and most of the old Chinese families of the place claim to have "come from Nanking" a phrase which means that their ancestors were natives of what we now call Kiangsu province. Whatever may have been the relationship between the conquerors and the Min Chia at that remote time, before long the racial distinction ceased to count as a political factor, and to-day there is no such thing as a Min Chia "nationality". The culture of the Min Chia still remains in many ways distinct, but the political fusion has become complete. The Kingdom of Nan Chao was in no sense a Min Chia kingdom, even though the district of the capital was then, as now, inhabited by Min Chia for it covered most of Yunnan and thus included a wide variety of peoples, from Tibetans and Li Su to Wa head hunters, even as the modern province of Yunnan does to-day. Even the dynasty of Nan Chao was more probably Shan than Min Chia, so that the change of rulers can hardly have seemed like a loss of independence to the men of that time.

There is thus at the present time nothing specifically Min Chia about the organisation of the government in Ta Li and the adjoining Hsien. These districts do not even follow the